TITLE:

**MUTANT FATTY ACID DESATURASE
AND METHODS FOR DIRECTED MUTAGENESIS**

Inventor:

John Shanklin
4 Duchess Street
Shoreham, New York 11786

Citizenship:

U.S.A.

Related Applications

The present application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/328,550 filed on June 9, 1999, which was a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/233,856 filed on January 19, 1999.

10

Background of the Invention

Fatty acid biosynthesis in higher plants has recently attracted increased interest because of the possible use of plant oils as renewable sources for reduced carbon. The diversity of fatty acid forms in wild plants is vast compared to that of crop plants. This diversity is reflected in the variations in chain length, the number and position of double bonds, and the position and occurrence of a variety of other functional groups in the fatty acids of wild plants.

In plants, fatty acid biosynthesis occurs in the chloroplasts of green tissue or in the plastids of non-photosynthetic tissues. The primary products in most plants are acyl carrier protein (ACP) esters of the saturated palmitic (palmitoyl-ACP) and/or stearic (stearoyl-ACP) acids, palmitic acid having a 16 carbon atom chain length and stearic acid having an 18 carbon atom chain length. Two types of desaturase molecules are involved in the production of monounsaturated fatty acids (monoenes), soluble, and integral membrane proteins. Desaturases are specific for a particular substrate carbon atom chain length (chain length specificity) and introduce the double bond between specific carbon atoms in the chain (double bond positional specificity) by counting from the carboxyl end of the fatty acid. For instance, the castor Δ^9-18:0 desaturase is specific for stearoyl-ACP, and introduces a double bond between carbon atoms 9 and 10.

The introduction of non-native desaturase isoforms having unique characteristic chain length and double bond positional specificities into agricultural crops offers a way to manipulate the content, physical properties and commercial uses of plant-produced oils. Unfortunately, the introduction of non-native acyl-ACP desaturase isoforms into

agricultural crop plants has yet to lead to the efficient production of unusual or uniquely useful monoenes by agricultural crop plants. An alternative way in which to accomplish the manipulation of the content, physical properties and commercial uses of oilseed crops would be through the introduction of a native desaturase which had been manipulated in such a way as to alter its chain length and/or double bond positional specificities.

As the genes encoding more desaturase enzymes are identified it is becoming apparent that many of the different activities are derived from relatively few common archetypes encoding the soluble and membrane classes of desaturases.

Molecular modeling and X-ray crystallographic studies of soluble acyl-ACP desaturases have identified amino acid residues within the substrate binding channel which are in very close proximity to the fatty acid substrate. Such residues are referred to as "contact residues". That earlier research demonstrated that certain modifications of one or more contact residues and modification of some non-contact residues can alter the *in vitro* chain-length and double bond positional specificities of acyl-ACP desaturases (Cahoon, et al. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA (1997) **94**:4872-4877 and Cahoon, et al. US Patent Nos. 5,705,391, 5,888,790

and 6,100,091). Those studies were carried out using
predictions formulated from the three dimensional structure
of the castor Δ^9-18:0 acyl-ACP desaturase in combination
with alignment of its sequence with that of a Δ^6-16:0 acyl-
ACP desaturase as well as with the sequences of other 18:0
desaturases. The studies examined the effects of replacing
specific contact and non-contact amino acid residues of the
Δ^6-16:0 desaturase with various amino acid residues in
cognate positions in the Δ^9-18:0 desaturase on the *in vitro*

10 substrate chain length and double bond positional
specificities of the 16:0 desaturase. The studies
demonstrated that substituting a major portion of the
substrate binding channel of a Δ^9-18:0 desaturase into the
homologous position of a Δ^6-16:0 desaturase converted its *in
vitro* specificity to that of a Δ^9-18:0 desaturase. This
could also be accomplished by replacing one contact and four
non-contact amino acids of the Δ^6-16:0 desaturase with five
amino acids of the Δ^9-18:0 desaturase which occupy
homologous positions. It was also shown that substituting

20 bulky contact amino acid residues (isoleucine for proline at
position 179 and phenylalanine for leucine at position 118)
into the substrate binding channel of the Δ^9-18:0 desaturase
increased its preference for the 16:0-ACP substrate such

that the *in vitro* 16:0-ACP activity became slightly more than two-fold greater than its remaining 18:0-ACP activity.

The ability to manipulate the chain length and double bond position specificities of desaturases has great potential with regard to generation and use of mutated native desaturases in the production of commercially useful products, such as vegetable oils rich in monounsaturated fatty acids. Such vegetable oils are important in human nutrition. In addition, because a double bond in an

10 otherwise saturated carbon chain is readily susceptible to chemical modification, fatty acid chains having double bonds in unique positions produced by crop plants can be useful raw materials for industrial processes.

The earlier studies making use of molecular modeling and crystallographic data, while successful, were extremely time consuming and the *in vitro* activity of the altered enzymes was not directly correlated to the *in vivo* specificities of the altered enzymes. Those studies pointed out a need for a simplified and general method for readily

20 producing mutants of desaturases which have altered and desirable chain length and double bond positional specificities.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to a simple and general method for producing a mutant of a fatty acid desaturase, the original desaturase having an 18 carbon atom chain length substrate specificity, the mutant produced having substantially increased activity relative to the original desaturase towards fatty acid substrates with chains containing fewer than 18 carbons. The method involves inducing one or more mutations in the nucleic acid sequence

10 encoding the original desaturase, transforming the mutated nucleic acid sequence under conditions for expression into a cell which normally requires a growth medium that is supplemented with unsaturated fatty acids in order to proliferate (*i.e.*, an unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph cell), and then selecting for recipient cells which have received a mutant fatty acid desaturase with a specificity for shorter carbon atom chain length substrates. In a preferred embodiment, the mutated nucleic acid sequences are transformed into an *E. coli* unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph

20 designated MH13. The cells are then grown in the absence of added unsaturated fatty acids to select for recipient MH13 cells which express mutated enzymes which are capable of producing sufficient unsaturated fatty acids in the cell to support growth, thereby overcoming the auxotrophy.

Another aspect of the present invention includes the mutants which are produced. Mutants of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase produced by the method arise from amino acid substitutions at specific residues. These mutants each have altered substrate chain length specificity, of 16- or fewer carbon atoms. Other embodiments of the present invention encompass the expression of the mutant desaturase molecules in individual cells and also in transgenic plants, for the production of specific fatty acid products.

10   Another aspect of the present invention is a method for specifically altering a function of a protein through directed mutagenesis. The method involves identifying candidate amino acid positions of the protein which, when mutated, are predicted to alter the function. A library of mutants of the protein which are produced by randomization of the amino acid at each candidate position, in combination with randomization of every other candidate position is generated, and mutants which exhibit the desired specific alteration of function are identified from the library. In

20   a preferred embodiment, candidate amino acid positions are identified by a combination of methods, some examples being random mutagenesis, structural analysis of the protein, and sequence analysis of the protein. Examples of functions which the method can be used to alter include enzymatic

functions, substrate specificity, binding functions, and structural functions. The method of the present invention is compared to the method of random mutagenesis in alteration of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase substrate chain length specificity.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 lists the amino acid sequence of mature castor enzyme (SEQ ID NO: 1), and the corresponding nucleic acid coding sequence (SEQ ID NO: 2).

Figure 2 is a diagram illustrating the primers used for full positional randomization of site 117 of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase.

Figure 3 is a diagram illustrating the primers used for the generation of a combinatorial library of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase with full positional randomization of positions 114, 117, 118, 179, 181, and 188.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The present invention is based on the use of a bacterial selection system for the selection of mutant desaturase molecules which have 18-carbon atom chain length substrate specificities prior to the introduction of the mutation and which have a 16 or fewer carbon atom chain length substrate specificity of as a result of the mutation. A preferred bacterial strain used in the selection system,

E. coli MH13, is an unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph. MH13
normally requires a growth medium that is supplemented with
unsaturated fatty acids in order to proliferate. Previous
research (Cahoon, et al., (1996) J. Bacteriology **178**:936-939
and Thompson, et al. (1991) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA
88:2578-2582) demonstrated that although 14:0 and 16:0 acyl-
ACP desaturases were able to use *in vivo* pools of acyl-ACPs
in *E. coli* to produce monounsaturated fatty acids, Δ^9-18:0
acyl-ACP desaturases do not generate detectable amounts of

10 monounsaturated fatty acids when expressed in *E. coli*.
Thus, due to the substrate pools of saturated fatty acid
substrates in *E. coli*, the Δ^9-18:0 desaturase enzymes are
not sufficiently active in the *E. coli* host cell and are
thus not able to complement the deficiency in unsaturated
fatty acid auxotrophs such as *E. coli* MH13. Desaturase
enzymes which specifically utilize 18-carbon chain length
substrates cannot complement the auxotrophy due to the low
levels of such 18-carbon chain length substrates in the
bacterial cell. However, introduction of a functional

20 desaturase enzyme which has substantial activity towards
fatty acid substrates with chains containing 16 or fewer
carbons will complement this auxotrophy, allowing for the
growth and proliferation of the bacteria in the absence of
supplemental unsaturated fatty acids. These observations

have been exploited as a selection system for identifying

mutants of an 18-carbon specific fatty acid desaturase which

have a substantially increased activity towards fatty acid

substrates with chains containing 16 carbons or 14 carbons.

While *E. coli* MH13 is a preferred host cell, one of skill in

the art will recognize that other host cell types may be

employed.

The present invention provides for a method of

producing a mutant of a fatty acid desaturase, the mutant

10   being characterized as having a specificity for shorter

chain length fatty acid substrates compared to the original

fatty acid desaturase. The method requires nucleic acid

sequences encoding a fatty acid desaturase with 18 carbon

atom chain length substrate specificity. To produce the

mutant, mutations are induced in the nucleic acid sequence

encoding the fatty acid desaturase. The mutated nucleic

acid sequence is then transformed into the MH13 *E. coli*

cells under conditions appropriate for expression of the

mutated sequence. The transformed MH13 *E. coli* cells are

20   then selected for the ability to grow in the absence of

supplemental unsaturated fatty acids. Survival of a

transformed MH13 *E. coli* indicates the acquisition of a

mutant fatty acid desaturase which complements the fatty

acid auxotrophy of MH13 because of its altered chain length specificity.

A mutant fatty acid desaturase identified by the above selection assay has a substantial increase in the activity towards fatty acid substrates with chains containing fewer than 18 carbons, relative to the original desaturase. A substantial increase in substrate specificity with respect to the original desaturase is one that produces sufficient accumulation of unsaturated fatty acids, which results from

10   desaturation by the mutant desaturase, within an unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph host organism so as to support growth and proliferation of the host organism. Substantial increase in activity sufficient to support growth of the auxotroph host is at least three-fold higher than that of the non-mutagenized precursor desaturase. In a preferred embodiment, the increase in activity of the mutant desaturase is at least ten-fold higher than the non-mutagenized precursor desaturase.

The Exemplification section below details experiments

20   where the method was used to identify mutants of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase with modified substrate specificities. One of skill in the art will recognize that the method is suitable for producing mutants of any fatty acid desaturase which has an 18 carbon atom chain length substrate

specificity prior to mutagenesis. To do so requires only a nucleic acid sequence for the desaturase. Expression of the nucleic acid sequence results in the production of a mature fatty acid desaturase, and following mutagenesis of the nucleic acid sequence, those sequences which are mutated to cause the alteration in the chain length specificity of enzyme will be expressed and identified through the selection procedure.

10   The nucleic acid sequences having silent mutations which do not affect the amino acid sequence of the translated product would not be identified in the selection procedure. Nucleic acid sequences encoding a functional fatty acid desaturase, whose amino acid sequence varies from wild type, for example with conservative amino acid substitutions that do not affect function in regard to carbon chain length substrate specificity would also not be identified in the selection procedure. However, such mutated desaturases may be desirable when incorporating several different functional mutations into one mutant.

20   In preferred embodiments, the fatty acid desaturase is a plant fatty acid desaturase. There are two types of plant fatty acid desaturases, soluble (acyl-ACP desaturases), and integral membrane (acyl lipid desaturases), both of which are suitable for use in the present invention.

In one embodiment, the MH13 *E. coli* also express an exogenous plant ferredoxin. This can be accomplished by introduction of an expression vector containing sequences which encode plant ferredoxin (e.g. *Arabaena* vegetative ferredoxin), and the application of selective pressure to the resulting bacteria. The presence of plant ferredoxin, the redox partner of the plant desaturases, facilitates the function of the plant desaturase in *E. coli*. The presence of plant ferredoxin in the selection system allows for the

10 selection of mutants with low specific activities towards fatty acids with 16 or fewer carbon atoms. Mutants which complement MH13 in the absence of plant ferredoxin are expected to have comparatively higher specific activities toward the shorter fatty acid substrates (Cahoon, et al. (1996)).

The selection system described above is most appropriate for use in selecting mutants with the desired substrate specificity from a population of heterogenous mutant fatty acid desaturase molecules. By transforming a

20 population of mutated nucleic acid sequences, entire libraries of mutants can be screened for the ability complement the MH13 auxotrophy.

Any type of mutation which has the potential to result in a modified fatty acid desaturase protein product can be

induced in the nucleic acid sequences. Logic based

approaches of introducing amino acid substitutions into

residues which interact with substrate are sound but can be

very labor intensive and are mainly suited to cases in which

structural information is available. Such methods have been

successfully employed for modifying the chain length

specificity of soluble desaturases, and for the introduction

of double-bond versus hydroxyl group for the membrane class

of enzymes (Cahoon et al., (1997); Shanklin, et al. (1998)

10   Annu. Rev. Plant Physiol. Plant Mol. Biol. **49**:611-641).

Experiments described in the Exemplification section which

follows demonstrate a form of site directed mutagenesis

which specifically targets a particular codon, or codons, to

produce amino acid randomization at specific position(s)

within the protein product. These experiments also describe

utilization of random mutagenesis, which has the potential

to identify additional amino acids involved in substrate

specificity. The use of random mutagenesis is perhaps the

most powerful method because it does not rely on assumptions

20   about which residues are important, assumptions which are

based on structural information. The present method has the

ability to identify substitution mutations at positions

which are amino acid contact residues (positions which are

located nearest the substrate within the binding channel)

and also positions which affect the substrate specificity without directly contacting the substrate (Cahoon et al., (1997)).

Once mutated, the nucleic acid sequences are transformed into the MH13 cells. Transformation is preferably accomplished by electroporation, but alternative methods known to one of skill in the art can also be used.

Following transformation, the cells are selected for the presence of the mutant fatty acid desaturase. This is accomplished by growth on selective media (e.g. media lacking exogenously supplied unsaturated fatty acids). The media can be either solid or liquid. Using several rounds of selection, and/or varying or augmenting the selective pressures involved is also useful in increasing the number of mutants identified by the method.

The present invention is useful in the engineering of desaturase proteins with characteristic substrate chain length preferences. Such isoforms, when introduced into cells or organisms (e.g. agricultural crops) can be used to manipulate the physical properties and commercial uses of conventional plant oils. Cells and organisms which express these engineered desaturases are useful in the production of commercially useful products, such as vegetable oils rich in

monounsaturated fatty acids, which have many potential uses,
for example in human nutrition or as industrial chemicals.

The Exemplification section below details experiments
where the above described method was used to identify
mutants of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase which have modified
substrate specificities. Mutations in the coding region
which result in amino acid substitutions at position 114,
117, 118, 179, 181, or 188, and combined substitutions at
positions 114 and 188, are described, along with the
10 resulting altered specificity of these mutant proteins as
compared to wild type. Mutations in the coding region of
castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase which produce a combination of
amino acid substitutions at all six positions were also
identified, the mutant proteins encoded being referred to as
com2, com3, com4, com9, and com10. Table 3 lists the amino
acid substitutions and the specific activities of these
mutant proteins for the different substrates.

All five mutant proteins listed in Table 3 have the
amino acid substitutions T117R and G188L, in combination
20 with various substitutions at the remaining four positions.
The fact that these two mutations are the optimal changes at
their respective positions for reducing chain length
specificity suggests that they are likely the primary
determinants of the altered specificity in com2. The

observation that several other mutants containing this pair
of mutations have lower specific activity suggests that the
combination of mutations at the remaining four randomized
sites can also affect the specific activity of the mutants.
This conservation suggests that the substitutions T117R and
G118L are responsible for the change in substrate
specificity of the five mutants in Table 3. A mutant
desaturase with the combination of T117R and G118L
substitutions is expected to have enhanced activity for one

10 or more substrates with 16 or fewer carbons.

Another aspect of the present invention is a mutant
castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase which has a subset of the
amino acid substitutions of a mutant protein listed in Table
3. Such a mutant is expected to also have altered activity
towards the different substrates. The present invention
encompasses mutant castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase proteins
which have between 1 and 6 of the amino acid substitutions
of the com2 mutant, in any possible combination. In a
preferred embodiment, the combination includes at least

20 three of the amino acid substitutions of the com2 mutant.
Preferably two of these amino acid substitutions are T117R
and G188L. In addition, the present invention is intended
to encompass mutant Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase proteins which
have between 1 and 6 of the amino acid substitutions of the

com3 mutant, the com4 mutant, the com9 mutant, or the com10

mutant, respectively, in any possible combination. In a

preferred embodiment, the combination includes at least

three of the amino acid substitutions, of the mutant.

Preferably two of these substitutions are T117R and G188L.

Also included in the present invention are mutants which

have the above listed amino acid substitutions, and

combinations thereof, in combination with any other amino

acid substitutions, insertions or deletions. These

10 additional substitutions, insertions or deletion, may be

silent (e.g. do not affect function of the enzyme) or may

further alter enzyme function.

The above listed amino acid substitutions made at the

analogous positions in other ACP-desaturases, especially in

$18:0$-ACP desaturases, and preferably in Δ^9-$18:0$-ACP

desaturases, are predicted to have the analogous effects on

substrate specificity in these proteins as in the disclosed

desaturase mutants.

Nucleic acid sequences which encode the mutant proteins

20 described above, can be inserted into a DNA expression

vector, which can then be used to express the mutant

proteins in cells. Expression vectors which function in

either or both prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells exist and

are known to those of skill in the art. The appropriate

expression vectors are introduced into either prokaryotic cells, (e.g. bacteria) or eukaryotic cells (e.g. animal cells or plant cells) under conditions appropriate for expression of their coding sequences. Plant cells which express the mutant proteins can be used to produce transgenic plants which express the mutant proteins, and which produce the corresponding fatty acid products of the desaturases.

Another aspect of the present invention is a method for
10 specifically altering a function of a protein through directed mutagenesis. Upon determination of the specific function which is to be altered, candidate amino acid positions of the protein which are predicted to alter the function when mutated, are identified. Several methods for identifying candidate positions are described below. A library of mutants of the protein are generated by randomization of the amino acid encoded at each candidate position, in combination with randomization of every other candidate position within each mutant. This is generally
20 accomplished by generating a library of mutant nucleic acid sequences which encode the mutant proteins through simultaneous randomization of the codons for each candidate position, in combination with randomization of every other candidate position within each mutant. Mutant proteins,

encoded by the mutated nucleic acid sequences, which exhibit the desired alteration of function are then identified from the library.

A wide variety of functions are performed by proteins. Some proteins function as enzymes which catalyze reactions (e.g. catabolic, anabolic), some proteins function as binding proteins (e.g. ligand binding receptors, antibodies, adapter proteins), some proteins function as structural proteins (e.g. extracellular matrix proteins). The present invention is useful for altering any given function of any given protein. Because many proteins have more than one function, the specific function which is to be altered must first be determined. Often the functions of a multifunctional protein are independent of one another, allowing one function to be altered without affecting the other function(s) of the protein. In other cases, the functions are interlinked or interdependent, making alteration of a single function more complex. Alteration of a function is broadly defined herein as including any directed change in the function. Such changes include, without limitation, optimization of a function, (e.g. increasing the specific activity of an enzyme, increasing the binding affinity of a binding protein, increasing the integrity or stability of a protein's structure),

redirection of a functional property of a protein (e.g.

modifying the substrate specificity of an enzyme, modifying

the binding specificity of a binding protein, modifying a

structural component of a protein), and reduction (e.g.

abolishing) of a function. Complete alteration of a

designated function may necessarily be achieved in stages

through sequential alteration of individual components of

the function, producing a series of intermediate mutants,

the entire process culminating in the generation of a final

10   optimal mutant. Therefore, the process of altering a

function of a protein as described herein, is intended to

include optimizing, redirecting, or reducing a function of a

previously altered protein.

Candidate positions include the positions of amino

acids of the wild type protein which are involved (either

directly or indirectly) in the function. Importantly, an

indication of involvement in the function is all that is

required for selection of candidate positions. The

direction an individual mutation has or is expected to have

20   on the function is unimportant in the identification of

candidate positions. For instance, residues which when

mutated individually, result in a decrease of the function,

may be identified as candidates. Examples of amino acids

which are directly involved with function include, without

limitation, residues which make contact with other molecules involved in the function (e.g. substrate or ligand), and also residues which line or define binding sites. Examples of amino acids which have indirect involvement include, without limitation, residues which influence those directly involved residues, such as residues adjacent or near directly involved residues. Proximity need not be limited to primary sequence, but may be from secondary or tertiary structure relationships. In addition, residues may be

10 located near directly involved residues due to the formation of inter- or intra-molecular complexes. The influence that indirectly involved amino acids can have may be steric effects, chemical effects, or a combination of effects. Indirectly involved amino acids also include residues which participate in defining an element of the protein structure which is crucial for the function (e.g. the necessary conformation of a protein).

Candidate positions also include positions of amino acids which are not significantly involved (directly or

20 indirectly) in the function of the wild type protein, but which assume a role (direct or indirect) in function through mutagenesis. The term wild type is used herein to refer to the original sequence of a protein prior to mutagenesis, the term being inclusive of previously altered sequences.

Mutagenesis which confers a role in function to a previously uninvolved residue commonly involves the substitution of another amino acid at that particular position. However, a new involvement in function may also be conferred to a position by mutagenesis at another position.

The more information one has regarding the protein, the function of the protein which is to be altered, and the residues which participate in the function, the more productively one can go about altering the function. Candidate amino acid positions of the protein are identified by any number of means. Without limitation, such means include, random mutagenesis of the nucleic acid sequences encoding the protein, structural analysis of the protein, and sequence analysis of the protein, often coupled with comparison to related proteins. Methods for identification of candidate positions may be performed with the naturally occurring protein, or alternatively with a mutant version of the protein. In addition, analysis of related proteins (e.g. sequence analysis, structural analysis, mutagenesis) may indicate analogous candidate positions within the protein of interest which are likely involved in the function to be altered. The term related proteins as used herein includes different isomers of a protein, different phenotypes of a protein (e.g. naturally occurring mutants of

the same protein), and any other proteins or fragments thereof which have significant homology to the protein whose specific function is to be altered.

Random mutagenesis coupled with screening for loss or change of function mutants can identify amino acid positions which are crucial for function of the wild type protein. Random mutagenesis coupled with screening for gain or enhancement of function mutants can identify these crucial positions as well as positions which only minimally

10   participate in wild type function, but have gained an increased role through mutagenesis.

Structural analysis of a protein is also a very powerful tool with which to identify candidate residues. Structural information can be obtained from X-ray crystallography, or from other methods such as nuclear magnetic resonance. Often the structure of a protein performing of the function (e.g. an enzyme bound to substrate or an inhibitor, or a binding protein bound to ligand) provides a significant amount of information

20   regarding the amino acid positions involved in the function.

Preferably, a combination of methods are employed to identify candidate amino acid positions. In a preferred embodiment, all available means are employed to ensure identification of as many candidate positions as possible.

Once the candidate positions are identified, a library

of mutant proteins which have every candidate position

within each mutant randomly substituted with 1 of 20

possible amino acids. This method of substituting 1 of the

20 possible amino acids at a specific position within a

protein is referred to herein as randomization of the amino

acid. Randomization of the amino acid encoded at each and

every candidate codon within an individual particular

protein is referred to herein as combinatorial full

10   positional randomization. A library of mutant proteins

resulting from combinatorial full positional randomization

is most easily produced by generating a nucleic acid library

of mutated coding sequences of the protein, which have 1 of

20 possible amino acid encoded at every candidate position

within. Because this type of mutagenesis allows for the

insertion of a codon for the wild type residue, as well as

the other 19 residues, at each candidate position, this

produces the widest possible variety of mutation

combinations. Combinatorial full positional randomization

20   of codons can be accomplished by a variety of methods. One

such method is the use of overlap-extension PCR to replace

all codons for candidate position amino acids with NNK or

NNN. The process of overlap-extension PCR has been used to

simultaneously introduce at least nine independent mutations into a particular coding sequence.

In another embodiment, a subset of one or more of the candidate positions are incompletely randomized, while the other candidate positions are fully randomized. That is to say, fewer than the 20 possible amino acids are introduced at one or more designated candidate positions, to more specifically direct the mutagenesis. This is accomplished by randomly replacing the subset of candidate position

10 codons of the nucleic acid sequence which encode the protein, with codons that encode the desired subset of amino acids, while introducing codons which encode all 20 amino acids at the other candidate positions.

Once the library is generated, mutant proteins which exhibit the desired altered function are identified. This is most efficiently accomplished by using a functional selection process. The mutated nucleic acid sequences are expressed individually, preferably by individual introduction into a single celled organism under conditions

20 appropriate for expression. Once expressed, the mutant proteins which exhibit the desired function may be selected by their function (e.g. a complementation assay). Alternatively, populations of mutants generated can be screened for the desired altered function (e.g. by a rapid

screening process). Each mutant generated can also be individually assayed for the desired altered function.

Experiments detailed in the Exemplification section which follows were performed to modify the substrate specificity and specific activity of castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase. Structural analysis of the protein was combined with random mutagenesis to identify candidate residues.

Random mutagenesis was used to identify candidate residues of the desaturase by a functional assay.

10 Theoretically, this method of identification has the potential to identify residues which may or may not line the substrate binding cavity, they are simply identified by a functional assay, thus this method of identifying residues likely to participate in function is applicable to both enzymes for which a structure is known, and enzymes for which a structure is unknown. All relevant knowledge should be included in compiling the list of candidate amino acid positions to be randomized.

One distinguishing feature of the present invention is

20 that combinatorial full positional randomization is performed simultaneously on all candidate positions which are identified. Previous approaches to directed mutagenesis to specifically alter a function of a protein have used a multistep approach, where one residue is mutated, the mutant

is characterized, and then that mutant is subjected to another round of single position mutagenesis. This standard approach results in each subsequently produced mutant carrying over specific mutations from the last mutant product. Thus, each subsequent mutant identified is necessarily constrained by properties inherited from the mutant from which it is generated, thus limiting the direction the mutagenesis may take to achieve the desired function. By eliminating this limitation, the method of the present invention generates a wider variety of mutants which demonstrate the desired activity, from which one can select an optimal mutant.

Exemplification

SECTION I: PRELIMINARY STUDIES

A mutagenesis and selection approach was employed to identify amino acid substitution mutations in plant fatty acid desaturases which modify substrate specificity. Acyl-ACP desaturases are functionally active when expressed in *E. coli*. Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturases are unable to alter the fatty acid profile of *E. coli* due to a lack of appropriate substrate (Thompson et al., (1991)). However, desaturases with 16:0 or 14:0 specificity were shown to alter the fatty acid profile of *E. coli* (Cahoon, et al. (1996)). Thus, 18:0 desaturases cannot complement the *E. coli* mutant MH13, an

unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph, but desaturases with specificities with 16 or fewer carbons are able to complement this auxotrophy. Thus, the MH13 *E. coli* strain was used to select for mutants of an 18-carbon desaturase which can utilize 16- or 14-carbon substrates in a complementation assay.

To facilitate the function of a plant acyl-ACP desaturase in *E. coli*, an expression vector containing the gene for plant-type ferredoxin, the redox partner of the plant desaturase, was transformed into the MH13 *E. coli* and maintained under selective pressure. These cells, MH13(pACYC/LacAnFd) were used in the following experiments.

The nucleic acid sequence for castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase was subjected to one of two types of mutagenesis, site directed or random mutagenesis, prior to introduction into the MH13 cells. PCR was used in site directed mutagenesis to randomize a targeted codon corresponding to a specified residue in the amino acid sequence of the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase. Target codons corresponding to Met 114, Leu 118, Pro 179, and Gly 188 were each subjected to independent randomization. Previous studies (Cahoon, et al. (1997)) had indicated that these residues are located adjacent to the substrate binding cavity and that replacing some of those amino acids in the *T. alata* Δ^6-16:0 desaturase

or in the castor Δ^9-18:0 desaturase with bulkier or less bulky amino acids could affect substrate specificity *in vitro*. The methods of the present invention allowed for an unbiased substitution of all 20 amino acids into these positions but required that the mutation have an affect on the *in vivo* substrate specificity of the desaturase. The mutagenesis reactions yielded four populations, each one comprising a library of coding sequences with substitution mutations consisting of all 20 potential amino acids at the

10 designated mutation site.

To examine whether mutations in additional contact and/or non-contact residues could alter the *in vivo* substrate specificity of the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase, a totally unbiased approach using random mutagenesis was performed on the sequences encoding castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase by single gene DNA shuffling.

MH13(pACYC/LacAnFd) were transformed with the resulting libraries of mutated 18:0-ACP desaturase, under conditions appropriate for expression, and then selected for expression

20 of a mutant with the ability to complement the unsaturated fatty acid auxotrophy, by growth in the absence of supplemental unsaturated fatty acid. To confer survival under the selective conditions, a mutant desaturase would necessarily have an altered substrate chain length

specificity of 16, 14 or fewer carbons. The selection for

site directed mutants was performed in either liquid media

or on agar plates. The selection for randomly generated

mutants was performed on agar plates. Growth in liquid

media involved several rounds of dilution and re-growth to

enrich for mutations that resulted in the best

complementation.

In a variation on the site directed mutagenesis,

mutants were selected from a library encoding all 400

10 possible combinations of amino acids at position 188 and

114, two adjacent contact residues within the substrate

binding channel. This was achieved by excising a

restriction fragment from the open reading frame of the

library encoding all possible amino acids at position 188

and inserting this fragment into the equivalent plasmid

population randomized for position 114. Using this method,

mutant M114I-G188L was identified in the selection

procedure. The coding sequences of the selected desaturases

were sequenced to identify the specific mutations which

20 conferred complementation to the fatty acid auxotrophy. The

substrate specificities of the identified mutants were

determined by *in vitro* enzyme assays (Cahoon et al.,

(1997)). Table 1 lists the identified mutations and the

altered chain length substrate specificity conferred.

Table 1

	Mutagenesis Method		Fold change in specificity with respect to wt	
Position	Directed	Random	16:18	14:18
Met 114	Ile (16)	Ile (16)	6	
Met 114	Phe (14)/ Tyr (14)		Phe 7	490
Thr 117		Ile (16)	not determined	
Leu 118	Phe (16)/ Tyr (16)	Phe (16)/ Met (16)	Tyr 130	
Pro 179	Ile (16)	Leu (14)	20	
Thr 181		Ile (16)	not determined	
Gly 188	Leu (16)		740	
Met 114/ Gly 188	M114I/ G188L (16)		1410	

Table 1. Mutations obtained by mutagenesis/selection numbers in parentheses represent the chain length specificity that is most enhanced with respect to the wt castor Δ^9-18:0 desaturase activity. Shown are also the fold change in specificity ratios where known. For instance, if the activity with respect to 16 carbon was increased by 10-fold, and the activity with respect to 18:0 was decreased by 5-fold, the "Fold change in specificity with respect to wt" for 16:18 would be 50.

The designated amino acid positions above correspond to the mature castor enzyme as defined in Lindqvist et al., EMBO J. **15**: 4081-4092 (1996), the sequence of which is listed in Figure 1 (SEQ ID NO: 1).

While the use of structure-guided (*i.e.*, directed) mutagenesis of residues M114, L118, P170 and G188 was effective for the identification of seven mutants with substrate specificities of 16 or fewer carbon fatty acids, the method relied on the appropriate choice of target residues for mutagenesis. It is well documented that residues that affect substrate specificity fall into two

broad classes, direct and indirect. Thus, random mutagenesis selection provides a bias-free method for the identification of changes that result in increased specificity for shorter acyl chains. Through random mutagenesis and selection of the present invention, five amino acid positions were identified, three at sites that were also targets for the structure-guided mutagenesis and two new sites, T117 and T181.

The naturally occurring 16:0-ACP desaturases from Milkweed and Doxantha have very poor activities when assayed *in vitro* (31 and 3 nM/min/mg, respectively). However, the selected mutant G188L has an activity of (175 nM/min/mg) much closer to that of the parental wild type castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase with its 18:0-ACP substrate.

To test whether the altered enzymes identified in the selection assay would result in the accumulation of unusual fatty acids when expressed in plants, the G188L mutant was introduced into *Arabidopsis thaliana* (fab1 background) using a napin promoter to drive expression. The first generation of G188L transgenics (T1) produced seeds which contained approximately 10% of fatty acids modified by the introduced desaturase. Because T1 seeds are heterozygous it is anticipated the levels of desired fatty acids will increase in the homozygous T2 plants. These results suggest that

mutants derived from castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase may be useful for future metabolic engineering of oil crops.

Materials and Methods for Section I

Cell lines. The *E. coli* unsaturated fatty acid auxotroph MH13 mutant of *E. coli* K12 (Henry, M.F., Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (1992)) is a *fadR*::Tn*5* mutant of cell line DC308 (Clark et al., (1983) Biochemistry **22**:5897-5902) which was constructed by phage P1 transduction from strain RS3069 (Simons et al., (1980) J. Bacteriol. **142**:621-632). MH13 requires a medium supplemented with unsaturated fatty acids at all growth temperatures due to a temperature-sensitive lesion in *fabA* and transposon disruption of *fadR*. An *Xba*I/*Eco*RI fragment from a pET9d expression plasmid containing the coding sequence of *Anabaena* vegetative ferredoxin (Fd) (Cheng et al., (1995) Arch. Biochem. Biophys. **316**:619-634) was inserted into the corresponding sites of pLac3d to generate the plasmid pLacAnFd. pLac3d is analogous to pET3d except that the T7 RNA polymerase promoter has been replaced with the *lacUV5* promoter of *E. coli* RNA polymerase as described previously (Cahoon et al., (1996)). A *Bgl*II/*Hind*III fragment from pLacAnFd was then inserted into the *Bam*HI/*Hind*III sites of pACYC184. This construct

(pACYC/LacAnFd) was then introduced into MH13 cells by electroporation.

Complementation Analysis/Selection. The *E. coli* MH13 strain harboring pACYC/LacAnFd was used as a host for expression of acyl-ACP desaturases. For these studies, the coding sequence of wild type and mutant mature acyl-ACP desaturases were inserted into pLac3d. Cells were transformed with the resulting plasmid constructs and were then grown on plates or in liquid broth containing Luria-

10   Bertani (LB) media with ampicillin (100 μg/ml), chloramphenicol (35 μg/ml), and kanamycin (40 μg/ml) selection. For non-selective growth, plates were supplemented with the fatty acid oleic acid solubilized in Tergitol NP-40 (Sigma) with final concentrations of 250 μg/ml oleic acid and 2% (v/v) Tergitol. Liquid broth was supplemented with oleic acid (solubilized in Tergitol NP-40) at a final concentration of 100 μg/ml. Oleic acid was initially prepared as 1000x stock solution in ethanol and solubilized in melted Tergitol, prior to addition to the

20   media. Media used to test for complementation did not contain added oleic acid, and IPTG was added at a concentration of 0.4 mM to induce expression of acyl-ACP desaturase.

<u>Transformation</u>.   Transformation was conducted by
electroporation using a 50 µl aliquot of competent MH13
cells harboring pACYC/LacAnFd and 0.1 to 0.5 µg of
expression plasmid for a given acyl-ACP desaturase.
Following electroporation, cells were resuspended in 500 µl
of LB media and shaken (250 rpm) at 37°C for 45 min to 1 h.
Cells were then plated on media as described above.
Alternatively, a 75 µl aliquot of the transformed cells was
added to 25 ml of LB media containing IPTG and antibiotics
10   at concentrations described above.   These cells were then
maintained with shaking at 30° or 37°C.

Electrocompetent MH13 (pACYC/LacAnFd) were prepared by
growing a culture from a single colony in low-salt LB media
(10 mg/ml Bacto tryptone, 5 mg/ml yeast extract, and 5 mg/ml
sodium chloride) containing kanamycin (40 µg/ml) and
chloramphenicol (35 µg/ml) and supplemented with oleic acid
(100 µg/ml) and 2% Tergitol (v/v).   Cells were prepared for
transformation and electroporated as described in the BioRad
protocol for high efficiency electro-transformation of *E.*
20   *coli*.

<u>Mutagenesis</u>.   Two methods were used for mutagenesis.
The first, site directed mutagenesis, randomized a target
residue at a specific location in the amino acid sequence of

the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase. Four target residues

were chosen: Met 114, Leu 118, Pro 179, and Gly 188. PCR

was used to generate four populations of DNA. Each

population consisted of sequences encoding castor Δ^9-18:0-

ACP desaturase with a randomized codon for residue 114, 118,

179, or 188. Each of the four populations was generated

using PCR site directed mutagenesis to produce DNA products

having equimolar proportions of each of the four nucleotides

at each position of the target codon. For each of the four

10 randomized products, an oligonucleotide primer was

synthesized which hybridized to sequences adjacent to the

target codon, and contained a randomized codon in place of

the target codon sequences, the primer population containing

equimolar proportions of each of the four nucleotides G, A,

T, and C at the three positions within the replacement

codon. This primer was used in conjunction with a primer

homologous to the 5' terminus of the gene to amplify the

gene segment between the two primer binding sites. A second

overlapping fragment was then synthesized using PCR to

20 amplify the remainder of the respective coding sequences of

the four PCR reaction products. The fragments were then

incorporated into larger gene fragments using overlap

extension polymerase chain reaction (Ho et al., (1989) Gene

77:51-59). The gene fragments containing the randomized target codons were inserted into pLac3.

The second mutagenesis method introduced random mutations into the coding region sequence by digesting the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase coding region with DNase, and reassembling using PCR (W. P. Stemmer, (1994) Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA **91**:10747-10751). The entire coding region was reinserted into pLac3 to make a library of pLac3 castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase genes with random mutations

10 throughout the coding region.

$$\text{SECTION II: COMPARISON OF FULL POSITIONAL}$$
$$\text{RANDOMIZATION WITH OTHER METHODS}$$

Single Position Mutagenesis

Four amino acid positions in the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase were identified by structural analysis (deductive reasoning by examination of a crystal structural model) as likely to participate in substrate specificity: 114, 118, 179, and 188. Independently, five positions were identified by random mutagenesis as likely to participate in substrate

20 specificity: 114, 118, 179, 117, and 181. Together, this yielded a total of six positions identified as likely to participate in substrate specificity: 114, 117, 118, 179, 181, 188. To identify which of the 20 possible amino acids inserted at a target position would produce a mutant with

the highest activity on 14 and 16 carbon substrates,
libraries of mutants were generated by randomization of one
of these positions at a time. Randomization resulted in
insertion of 1 of all 20 possible amino acids at the target
position. Six libraries were generated, one for each target
position. These libraries were introduced into MH13
bacteria to select for mutants with enhanced substrate
specificities of 14 or 16 carbon chain length.
Complementation of MH13, the unsaturated fatty acid

10   auxotroph of *E. coli*, requires that the desaturase have a
substrate specificity for 14 or 16 carbon chain length (or
perhaps fewer) fatty acids. Recipient colonies which were
able to grow under selective conditions were isolated. The
mutant desaturase was purified from a crude lysate of a
culture of the colony, and the specific activities for 14
and 16 carbon chain length substrates were determined for
selected mutants by assay of the protein. For some mutants
the specific activities of the enzyme were determined for
14, 16 and 18 carbon chain length fatty acyl ACP substrates.

20   Mutants produced from the two types of mutagenesis were
identified and compared. Table 2 lists the most active
mutants identified by the two methods. Table 3 compares the
activities of mutants at position 117 and mutants at
position 181, which were identified using both methods of

mutagenesis. Mutants identified from the libraries of target position randomized mutants (full positional randomization) demonstrated the higher specific activities for 14 and 16 carbon substrates than did the mutants which were identified by random mutagenesis. Selection of mutants from a library produced by random mutagenesis only once (L118F) produced the same, most active mutant identified by the full positional randomization method. Other selected mutants which resulted from random mutagenesis had catalytic

10   rates inferior to the rates of mutants produced by full positional randomization. The reason for this is that random mutagenic process used could only generate between 4 and 7 amino acid substitutions per position. With respect to the six positions, at five of the positions, when offered all 19 substitutions by full positional randomization, a mutant enzyme with higher specific activity was obtained, and in the sixth case an identical enzyme having equivalent activity was obtained by both methods. This demonstrated that the greater number of substitutions tested for a single

20   position facilitated an increased probability of a higher increase in specific activity for a particular substrate.

Table 2

Site[4]	Random Point Mutagenesis[1] Sub[5]	Act[3] (nM/min./mg) 14	16	18	Full Positional Randomization[2] Sub[5]	Act[3] (nM/min./mg) 14	16	18
Met 114	Ile	3	22	260	Ile	3	22	260
Met 114					Phe/Tyr[6]	5	0.8	7
Thr 117	Ile	0.7	5	35	Arg[6]	3	30	332
Leu 118	Phe	0.5	42	270	Phe	0.5	42	270
Pro 179	Leu	15	22	206	Ile[6]	18	78	270
Thr 181	Ile	0.7	5	196	Phe[6]	5	64	198
Gly 188	None Identified				Leu[6]	11	173	19

Key: [1]Random point mutagenesis of the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase.
[2]Full positional randomization using a primer encoding NNK to give 32-fold degeneracy with codons encoding all 20 amino acids.
[3]Specific activity measured using ^{14}C-argentation thin layer chromatography assay in conjunction with phosphor imaging quantitation.
[4]Site of the amino acid position with respect to the mature castor open reading frame see following sheet for number definition.
[5]Substituted amino acid, in standard three letter format.
[6]Underlined amino acids identify substitutions that were not attainable by point mutagenesis.

Table 3

			Act[1] (nM/min./mg)		
Site[2]	Method	Sub[4]	14	16	18
Wt		None	0.8	12	820
Thr 117	RPM[3]	Ile	0.7	5	35
	FPR[4]	Arg[5]	3	30	332
	FPR	Val	1	0.7	35
	FPR	Lys	3	2.6	93
Thr 181	RPM	Ile	0.7	5	196
	FPR	Phe	5	64	198
	FPR	Trp	25	27	12
	FPR	Leu	2.4	42	181
	FPR	Met	3	15	479

Key: [1]Specific activity measured using ^{14}C-argentation thin layer
chromatography assay in conjunction with phosphor imaging quantitation.
[2]Site of the amino acid position with respect to the mature castor open
reading frame see following sheet for number definition.
[3]RPM randomized point mutagenesis of the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase
[4]FPR: Full positional randomization (using a primer encoding NNK to
give 32-fold degeneracy with codons encoding all 20 amino acids).
[5]Underlined amino acids identify substitutions that were not attainable
by single point mutagenesis.

Combinatorial Full Positional Randomization

In an effort to produce a mutant desaturase protein

which had enhanced activity for 14 and 16 carbon substrates,

a library of mutants were generated by randomizing all six

target sites, 114, 117, 118, 179, 179, and 188,

simultaneously. This procedure is termed combinatorial full

positional randomization. The library was introduced into

MH13, which were then plated on selective (unsupplemented)

media. A sample set of 19 colonies which grew on the

selective media were picked. The plasmid DNA was isolated

from each colony and used to re-transform the MH13 to

confirm that the plasmids encoded a modified desaturase.

Plasmids from each of the selected colonies were purified

and the DNA sequence of each selected mutant encoded was

determined.

Conceptual translation of the DNA sequences indicated

that all 19 mutants had distinct combinations of amino acids

at the six target sites. All 19 mutant desaturase enzymes

were produced and purified and subjected to *in vitro* enzyme

assays. Table 4 lists five of the mutants produced and

their specific activities for the different substrates.

Table 4

Combinatorial Mutants Containing T117R and G188L

	Position						Activity[1]		
	114	117	118	179	181	188	14	16	18
Wild Type	M	T	L	P	T	G	0.8	11.5	820
Mutants									
com2	A	R	G	V	V	L	59	270	420
com3	Q	R	P	V	D	L	0	13	3
com4	T	R	A	L	S	L	13	132	12
com9	V	R	G	S	C	L	1.9	42	nd[2]
com10	Y	R	P	A	F	L	2	22	nd[2]

[1]Activity (nm/min/mg) determined with 3 fatty acid ACP substrates
[2]nd = not determined

The mutation having the highest specific activities for

the tested substrates was com2. This mutant had far higher

specific activity for 14 and 16 carbon substrates than did any of the single position mutants, exhibiting 74 and 23 times wild type activities for the respective substrates (Table 5).

Table 5

Comparison of Combinatorial Full Positional Randomization with Other Methods[1]

Position	FPR	14	16	RPM	14	16
M114	Phe	6	0.1	Ile	4	2
L118	Phe	1	4	Phe	1	4
P179	Ile	23	7	Leu	19	2
G188	Leu	14	15	–	–	–
T117	Arg	4	3	Leu	1	0.5
T181	Trp	31	2	Leu	1	4
Com2		74	23			
Com2	M114A	T117R	L118G	P179V	T181V	G188L

[1]All activities are reported as the fold change in activity compared to the wild type castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase activity for that chain length (*i.e.*, 0.8 and 11.5 nm/min/mg protein for 14 and 16 carbon atom substrates, respectively. Underlined residues are those yielding the highest increase when tested for activity in single mutants.

Two of the amino acid substitutions in com2, T117R, and G188L, were determined to be the optimal substitutions for those positions by the independent randomization studies described above. This correlation indicates that the increase in specificity of the com2 mutant is due to the

substitutions at these two residues. Notably, neither of
these changes were available via point mutagenesis. As
indicated in Table 4, five of the 19 combinatorial mutants
analyzed contained these two specific mutations, T117R and
G188L, but contained different substitutions at the other
four positions. These five mutants exhibited various
changes in specific activity for the two substrates. Thus
substitutions at positions 114, 118, 179 and 181 had a
profound effect on the influence of the changes at positions

10   117 and 188. Therefore, the combination of substitutions at
the other four sites could either accentuate the positive
effects that T117R and G188L had on activity, or
alternatively, could block the effect. Increasing the
number of possible combinations of amino acids at all
positions identified as affecting the substrate specificity
(e.g. when substituted individually), including amino acid
substitutions which are sub-optimal for affecting the
substrate specificity individually, yields mutants with
optimal activities.

20   Indeed, the accommodation of mutations which produce
positive changes without in turn causing negative changes is
likely of great importance for obtaining optimal
performance. One could, in a sense, look at amino acids as
molecular shims in the structure, the more shims of

different sizes and properties that can be used to modulate

the structure, the higher the likelihood that any particular

structure will have optimal activity. Thus the approach of

identifying as many positions as possible which might affect

a particular property of the protein, and then presenting as

many combinations at each of those positions as possible,

coupled with an appropriate screening process, will identify

a mutant protein which has optimal activity. For the

positions mutated in this example, point mutagenesis could

10   result in a limited number of amino acid substitutions: 6

at M114; 5 at T117; 5 at L118; 6 at P179; 6 at T181; and 5

at G188. Thus the total combinatorial number would be 6^3 x

5^3 = 27,000 unique mutants. If all 20 combinations were

permissible as in the combinatorial full positional

randomization method, that number would rise to 19^6 =

47,045,881, or 1742-fold more combinations from which to

select the optimal mutant for the particular trait. Since

subtle changes can dramatically affect the activity of a

protein, methods which result in more rather than fewer

20   mutations of positions of amino acids shown to affect

catalytic rates, will always produce equal or superior

results to methods employing the more restrictive point

mutagenesis.

<u>Materials and Methods For Section II are the same as those</u>

<u>used for Section I, unless as otherwise described below.</u>

<u>Full positional randomization.</u>   Castor-Δ^9-18:0-ACP

desaturase was subjected to mutagenesis prior to

introduction into the MH13 cells.   PCR was used in site

directed mutagenesis to randomize the three residues

comprising a codon corresponding to a specified residue in

the amino acid sequence of the castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP

desaturase.   Target codons corresponding to Met 114, Thr

10   117, Leu 118, Pro 179, Thr 181 and Gly 188 were each

subjected to independent randomization.   Because these

residues are located adjacent to the substrate-binding

cavity, amino acid substitutions at these positions are

considered highly likely to affect substrate specificity.

These mutagenesis reactions yielded four populations, each

one comprising a library of coding sequences with

substitution mutations consisting of all 20 potential amino

acids at the designated mutation site.   An example for the

introduction of all possible amino acid substitutions at

20   position 117 by overlap extension PCR is diagrammed in

Figure 2.   Primers used were 1:   GTGAGCGGATAACAATTTCACACAG

TCTAGAAAT (SEQ ID NO: 3), sequence flanking the unique XbaI

site at the 5' end of the open reading frame; 2:

CCAAATTGCCCAAGACGTCGGACTTGCACCTGTTTCATCCCGAACTCCATCCAAMNNATT

CAGCATTGTTTG (SEQ ID NO: 4), the noncoding mutagenic

oligonucleotide for position 117; 3: GAAACAGGTGCAAGTCCGAC

GTCTTGGGCAA (SEQ ID NO: 5), a non-mutagenic coding strand

primer with overlap to the mutagenic 117 primer; 4:

GTTTTCTGTCCGCGGATCCATTCCTG (SEQ ID NO: 6), a noncoding

strand primer flanking the unique SacII site of the open

reading frame. A PCR fragment was generated by overlap

extension of fragments a and b using primers 1 and 4. This

fragment was restricted by XbaI and SacII and introduced

10   into the equivalent sites into pLac3 containing the wild

type castor Δ^9-18:0-desaturase. The other five positions of

castor Δ^9-18:0-desaturase were mutated independently in an

equivalent fashion to methods used for position 117.

Random point mutagenesis. Random mutagenesis was

performed on sequences encoding castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP

desaturase by single gene DNA shuffling (W. P. Stemmer,

(1994)). The open reading frame was first amplified by PCR

using the primers: GTGAGCGGATAACAATTTCACACAGTCTAGAAAT (SEQ

ID NO: 7) which corresponds to the coding strand, and

20   CACGAGGCCCTTTCGTCTTCAAGAATTCTC (SEQ ID NO: 8) which

corresponds to the noncoding strand. Approximately 50-200

bp from the wild type castor open reading frame was digested

with DNaseI to make fragments at random positions within the

open reading frame. The gene was then assembled by

primerless PCR, followed by amplification of the full open

reading frame using 5' and 3' specific primers. This method

incorporated primarily point mutations at high frequency.

The mutagenesis method used here was arbitrarily chosen, any

method of point mutagenesis could have been used to produce

equivalent results.

Combinatorial full positional randomization. For the

combinatorial 6 site-specific full positional randomization

primers were engineered to contain NNK (where N refers to an

10 equimolar mixture of G, A, T and C, and K refers to an

equimolar mixture of G and T) for each of the six target

codons. The full open reading frame was assembled and

amplified by overlap extension PCR as shown in Figure 3.

Primers corresponding to the diagram were 1: GTGAGCGGATAA

CAATTTCACACAGTCTAGAAAT (SEQ ID NO: 3), sequence flanking the

unique XbaI site at the 5' end of the open reading frame; 2:

TTGATAAGTGGGAAGGGCTTCTTCCGTT (SEQ ID NO: 9), non-mutagenic

noncoding primer; 3: AACGGAAGAAGCCCTTCCCACTTATCAAAC

ANNKCTGAATNNKNNKGATGGAGTTCGGGATGAAAC (SEQ ID NO: 10),

20 mutagenic coding strand primer; 4: TCCATTCCTGAACCAA

TCAAATATTG (SEQ ID NO: 11), non-mutagenic noncoding strand

primer; 5: TTGATTGGTTCAGGAATGGATNNKCGGNNKGAAAACAGTCCATACCT

TNNKTTCATCTATACATCATTCC (SEQ ID NO: 12), mutagenic coding

strand primer; 6: GCAAAAGCCAAAACGGTACCATCAGGATCA (SEQ ID NO:

13), noncoding non-mutagenic primer flanking the KpnI site.
The three fragments were first amplified as shown in Figure
3. They were isolated and amplified by overlap-extension
PCR as described above for full positional randomization of
T117. The final fragment was restricted using XbaI and
KpnI, and introduced into the equivalent sites in pLac3
containing the wild type castor Δ^9-18:0-ACP desaturase.

Selection of mutant desaturases with altered chain
length specificity. To facilitate determination of the
10   function of a plant acyl-ACP desaturase in *E. coli*, an
expression vector containing the gene for plant-type
ferredoxin, the redox partner of the plant desaturase, was
transformed into the MH13 *E. coli* and maintained under
selective pressure. These cells, MH13(pACYC/LacAnFd) were
used in the following experiments. MH13(pACYC/LacAnFd) were
transformed with the resulting libraries of mutated 18:0-ACP
desaturase under conditions appropriate for expression. To
achieve this, clones were restricted with either XbaI and
KpnI, or XbaI and EcoRI, and introduced into the
20   corresponding sites of plasmid pLac3 containing the mature
castor Δ^9-desaturase open reading frame. The plasmid pLac
contains the Lac promoter which can be induced using the
chemical inducer ispropyl β-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG).
Selection media lacking unsaturated fatty acids was used to

identify mutants with the ability to complement the unsaturated fatty acid auxotrophy. To confer survival under the selective conditions, a mutant desaturase would necessarily have an altered substrate chain length specificity of 16, 14 or fewer carbons. The selection for site directed mutants was performed in either liquid media or on agar plates. The selection for randomly generated mutants was performed on agar plates. Growth in liquid media involved several rounds of dilution and re-growth to

10 enrich for mutations that resulted in the best complementation. DNA for all mutants identified in this fashion was isolated and reintroduced into the mutant *E. coli* cell line, which was subjected to another round of selection to confirm the phenotype. The DNA of the selected desaturases were sequenced and translated conceptually to identify the specific mutations incurred.

Enzyme analyses. For determination of biochemical parameters of the desaturase mutants, the open reading frame was excised by restriction with XbaI and KpnI and ligated

20 into the corresponding sites of the plasmid pLac3, which put the mature castor Δ^9-desaturase open reading frame under the control of the Lac promoter. The plasmid was expressed in the cell line BL21DE3 Gold (Novagen) for expression. Cells were grown to 0.5 OD600, induced by addition of 0.4 mM IPTG

and harvested after four hours. The desaturase enzyme was extracted and purified to near homogeneity (90%) by HPLC cation exchange chromatography using Poros 20CM media (Perseptive Biosystems). Purified desaturase was assayed using Cl-^{14}C acyl-ACP of appropriate chain lengths. Substrate and products were converted to methyl esters and analyzed by argentation thin layer chromatography and phoshor-imaging. Specific activities with the different substrates were calculated (Cahoon et al., (1997)).